The years from 1987 to 2001 brought the publication and reinterpretation of three documents from Mari indicating that in that culture the god Dumuzi was regarded as being of the “dying and rising god” type. One of those documents is a letter from the year 12 of the reign of Zimri-līm (from the first half of the 18th century BCE), composed by the head of a seminomadic Amorite tribe, in which there is mention in passing of the death and return of Dumuzi. The other two are economic documents, in one of which the day of Dumuzi’s burial in the fourth year of Zimri-līm’s reign is mentioned, and in the other, the day of his return. Since prior to the publication of these documents we had only one sole reference in cuneiform literature to Dumuzi’s return from the underworld, as against innumerable attestations to his death, the new evidence from Mari is of great importance to our understanding of the Mesopotamian myth of Dumuzi in particular, and of the mythology of dying and rising gods in Western Asia in general. However, the fact that it was specifically at Mari that evidence was found for that mythic type, along with the fact that the clearest piece of evidence is included in a letter of one of the Amorite chieftains (and not, say, in a letter of an ambassador or priest), raises a question about the origin of this mythic pattern at Mari. In light of the fact that we are dealing with the Mesopotamian name “Dumuzi,” should we indeed be looking for the origin of the myth in the Mesopotamian culture to the east of Mari, or might the source instead be in the Amorite tribes who migrated from the Levant to Mari at the end of the third millennium? Scholars have long noted the Western Semitic characteristics of the Amorite culture of Mari, whose source is in the neighboring cultures of Syria and the Levant. Might this not be another of those characteristics?

In order to deal with this question, I will survey in brief the evidence at hand for dying and rising gods on both sides of Mari. I will begin with the data from Mesopotamia, which are among the earliest discoveries of modern cuneiform studies. Then I will take up the relatively recent data from Mari, and finally I will examine the data from the Levant. In light of the findings, I will suggest a new perspective on the question of dying and rising gods in general and on the question of the revival of Dumuzi in particular, questions that have engaged scholars since the end of the 19th century.